

E-filing underway in Madison County Court

November 9, 2010

Attorneys filing civil cases in Madison County Court can now use electronic filing.

Madison County Court judges requested to be included in a pilot project already in use in Circuit and Chancery Courts in Madison County. County Court Judges William Agin and Edwin Hannan approved their court's participation in the Mississippi Electronic Courts (MEC) pilot program in orders signed Sept. 2 and Nov. 2.

E-filing is voluntary in Madison County Court civil cases. A date has yet to be set for e-filing to become mandatory in County Court, said Madison County Circuit Clerk Lee Westbrook. E-filing is already mandatory in Circuit and Chancery Court proceedings in Madison County.

Westbrook, whose office is the repository for Circuit and County Court records, said only a few adjustments were needed to adapt e-filing for County Court. She is pleased with the e-filing system.

"It is making the court system run more efficiently, and the judges have immediate access to the most recent filing without waiting for the paper to find its way to the proper file," Westbrook said..

County Courts weren't part of the original pilot project plan. Judge Hannan said he asked to be included because he was eager to make use of the technology to help manage the County Court's increasing case load.

"I'm a firm believer that we need to use technology to make what we do more efficient," Judge Hannan said. "I want to use it as a docket management tool. To the extent this can be a convenience to the bar, I want to facilitate that."

Statewide, about 1,500 attorneys and 440 lay persons have registered to use the MEC system, said Calvin Ransfer, program director for the MEC pilot project.

The electronic filing system allows attorneys to file or read court documents via the Internet 24 hours a day without having to go to the courthouse. Members of the public may view electronic documents via the Internet.

Judge Hannan said, "Lawyers don't have to send someone to courthouse to file it. They don't have to spend the money on postage. They are hitting a send button on the computer."

"We move a lot of paper through this courthouse," Judge Hannan said. Madison County Court's civil case filings included 1,162 cases in calendar year 2007, 1,419 cases in 2008 and 1,371 cases in 2009.

"The state of the economy is reflected in this courthouse," Judge Hannan said. Lawsuits involving auto accidents, contract disputes and debt collections are among those litigated in County Court, where the jurisdictional limit is up to \$200,000.

The electronic filing pilot program is being tested in trial courts in Madison, Scott and Warren counties. Madison County Chancery and Circuit Courts were first to test electronic filing in the MEC system. Voluntary electronic filing began in Madison Chancery Court in

July 2009. E-filing became mandatory in that court in September 2009 for all new cases and for pleadings filed in cases commenced on or after May 15, 2008. Madison Circuit Court began voluntary e-filing in specified civil cases in March 2010, and e-filing became mandatory in April.

Scott County Chancery Court began voluntary e-filing in February 2010, and e-filing became mandatory in April in certain cases. Work is underway to adapt e-filing for civil cases in Scott County Circuit Court, with voluntary e-filing expected to begin later this year.

Warren County Chancery Court began accepting voluntary e-filing in June, and e-filing became mandatory in certain cases in July. Work is underway to adapt e-filing for civil cases in Warren County Circuit Court and County Court, with voluntary e-filing expected to begin later this year in those courts.

The final phase of the pilot will be adaptation of the system to criminal case files, Ransfer said. That work is underway.

Attorneys and members of the public must set up an MEC account to be able to gain access to the electronic documents. Registration is available on the State of Mississippi Judiciary website at <http://www.mssc.state.ms.us/mec/mec.html>.

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